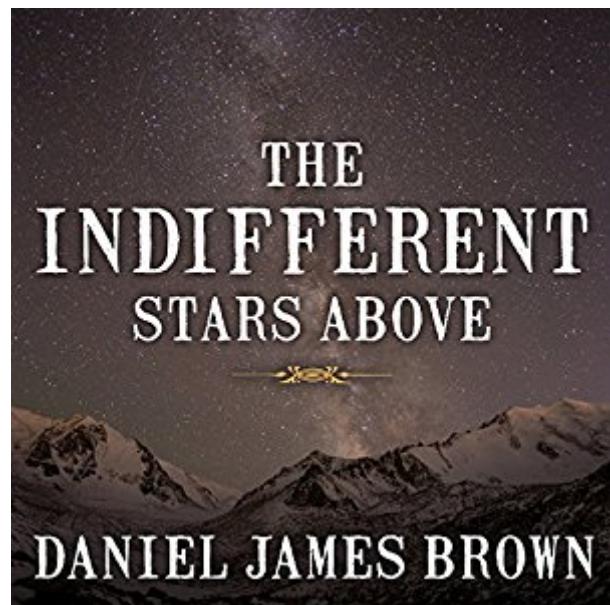


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# The Indifferent Stars Above: The Harrowing Saga Of A Donner Party Bride



## **Synopsis**

In April 1846, twenty-one-year-old Sarah Graves, intent on a better future, set out west from Illinois with her new husband, her parents, and eight siblings. Seven months later, after joining a party of emigrants led by George Donner, they reached the Sierra Nevada Mountains as the first heavy snows of the season closed the pass ahead of them. In early December, starving and desperate, Sarah and fourteen others set out for California on snowshoes and, over the next thirty-two days, endured almost unfathomable hardships and horrors. In this gripping narrative, New York Times best-selling author Daniel James Brown sheds new light on one of the most infamous events in American history. Following every painful footstep of Sarah's journey with the Donner Party, Brown produces a tale both spellbinding and richly informative.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

I simply cannot say enough about this writer! As soon as I start reading I am immediately hooked! His writing style and skill just bring the people and the circumstances alive! This is such a moving story about a family(s) who essentially give up their homes to go to CA (which isn't even a state at the time of these events). Imagining the hardships they suffered cannot even be put into words but Daniel Brown puts you there - in that moment with each of the individuals in this story. I am not a person who cries easily but I must say that after a certain horrific event in the story I simply put down my kindle and wept. Not a few tears....I wept. I loved at the end of the story how the author told you what became of the individuals who survived. There was some closure in knowing what

became of these courageous people. My husband also read this story and we have built into an upcoming cross country trip plans to stop at Donner Lake based on reading this book. This story and book are remarkable!

Twice I found this book hard to put down. When I finished it the first time, I started over again and read it all the way through again. I really liked the historical details that Brown gives such as the economic climate of the 1840s, the mores and customs of the time, what kinds of things the settlers were likely to have packed, etc. That means he stops the action of the story to provide such details, which might bother you if you want a quick action story, but I loved Brown's style. He begins his narrative before the settlers begin their journey and intersperses background information throughout their story of hardship. I liked learning such things as the political and economic context of the American western migration, getting a glimpse of nineteenth century family dynamics and hearing what modern climatologists say about the weather the Donner party endured. If you like historical context and details, this is your Donner party story.

I wanted to scream turn back you're going to die, but helpless to do so. Some critics complained that the characters didn't come alive for them. The only character that was there from the beginning, that stalked them from behind every tree, under every snowflake was the angle of DEATH. It smiled at them from the beautiful mountain views, the salt desert the rock formations and he struck. One or two a first than tens and twenties too late to recognize they were in his grip. This book was about us how we as humans can slip into abject dispair and miss al the signs. Clime a ridge to your right and you live move to left and die. Could this book have been better, I have read hundreds of books and all have strong and weak points. Could it have been in a more historical narrative form, maybe. Could a Ron Chernow or Ronald White don a more compelling job, perhaps. But James Brown did an excellent job and I will highly recommend this book to everyone loves books about human history.

This is a fascinating story, told in detail that indicates exhaustive research - but still it felt a bit flat as well as somewhat padded. In trying to describe the events by focusing on a single participant, author Brown is forced into a fair amount of conjecture, and never really makes the character of Sarah Graves Fosdick come to life. The epilogue in particular goes on too long - each segment could more or less be boiled down to "I drove to this place where stuff happened, and thought about the stuff that happened." Incidentally, there's a rather glaring formatting error in the Kindle edition of

this book: following Chapter 17, chapters 16 and 17 are repeated before the narrative heads into the Epilogue. This only adds to the sense that the material has been padded to make it book-length, and should be corrected.

Daniel James Brown's account of the Donner party disaster is a riveting retelling of this ill-fated journey. He has done copious research, not only on the Donner party itself, but on the physical, emotional and psychological effects of prolonged starvation and exposure, and manages to weave it all into a fascinating narrative. He presents his material so vividly I almost felt as if I were there seeing it all firsthand. His choice to follow Sarah Foster's journey, both through his book and actually physically in taking a driving trip overland, was a wise one. The sympathetic portrait he paints of this young woman, scarcely out of her teens yet faced with more horrific, agonizing decisions than most people experience in a lifetime, gives the book a center and an immediacy that it otherwise might have lacked. Definitely this is going to become must-reading for all those interested in the fate of the Donner Party.

I bought this book because everyone in my family read the author's *The Boys in the Boat* and loved it. I couldn't get into a story about a rowing team, though I may after reading this book. *The Indifferent Stars Above* is simply an amazing piece of nonfiction. I'm a California native and have known about the Donner Party forever. "Oh, yeah, those are the dopes who waited too long to cross the Sierras in winter. They got stuck in the snow and ended up eating each other to survive." But that isn't ALL that happened. They were betrayed by someone they trusted and took an untried road over the Sierras. This is an eye opener about what actually happened and how awful it was, as well as the actual characters/events of the settlement of CA, the golden state. Meticulously researched. Our forbearers, the ones with money and influence, weren't so hot. Read the book. you'll see. One of the things that I liked the best was that the author didn't just stop with the disaster, but followed the characters into their subsequent lives. That made the horror more palatable.

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